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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001804

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIAN CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS DEBRIEF STEVEN SOLARZ

REF: A. ISTANBUL 1680

[B](#). YEREVAN 1479

[C](#). 04 ISTANBUL 1074

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Three organizers of the recent "Alternative Armenian Conference" here (ref A) told former U.S. Congressman and GOT consultant Steven Solarz October 7 that the watershed conference would embolden students to pursue more serious and objective research on the topic. They averred - largely on the basis of anecdotal evidence and contrary to Solarz's understanding - that Talat Pasha's orders to deport and kill Armenians pre-dated by several months the murder of tens of thousands of Muslims by Armenians in the town of Van. They suggested the richest source of archival materials on the 1915-16 events is the Dashnak archives in Boston, smuggled out of Armenia during the Soviet era and still closed to all except members of the Armenian Revolutionary, or "Dashnak" party. End summary.

Conference will Encourage Further Study

[1](#)2. (C) Organized by the Consulate at Solarz's request, the gathering included Sabanci University's Hakan Erdem and Aksin Somel, and Marmara University's Ayhan Aktar. Solarz began by recounting his once having been hung in effigy on an Armenian parade float in the U.S. for his pro-Turkish views. He then asked about the logistics behind the conference, its general content and conclusions. Erdem noted that, contrary to some press accounts, speakers had represented a variety of viewpoints, with the vast majority concentrating on topics not directly related to the question of genocide. Professor Somel, for example, focused on Armenian education.

[1](#)3. (C) The three scholars agreed that the conference marked a new beginning for scholarship on the topic. Whereas graduate students in the past had avoided the sensitive issue, the conference would embolden them to pursue serious, objective and scholarly research. Nonetheless, while archives in Turkey and Armenia are "technically" open to scholars, problems remain, cf. the recent arrest of a Q.S.-based Turki

scholar in Armenia. (Note: This particular arrest appears to have resulted from the scholar's inappropriate removal of archival materials (ref B). End note.) The scholars asserted that the richest source of materials is the Dashnak archives in Boston, smuggled out of Armenia during the Soviet era. Those reportedly remain closed to all except members of the Armenian Revolutionary, or "Dashnak" party (Note: A political party active in Armenia and the dominant political organization in the Diaspora. End note).

Did They or Didn't They?

[1](#)4. (C) Solarz focused mainly on the period 1915-16, and specifically on the question of "intent," i.e. whether or not it was the Ottoman government's intent to annihilate the entire Armenian population on the basis of ethnicity. All three interlocutors cited testimonial evidence that then-Interior Minister Talat Pasha ordered governors via telegram to deport Armenians. Unfortunately, they acknowledged, none of the actual telegrams had been found. Most governors reportedly complied with the deportation order; others resisted and were themselves replaced. In very few instances (five to eight out of a total of several hundred), the Armenians were left in place because the governors refused to follow orders.

[1](#)5. (C) There is also evidence -- again, they conceded, largely anecdotal -- that Talat ordered the Committee of Union and Progress to kill Armenians, which was carried out with the help of the so-called "Special Organizations" (composed of recently-released criminals). Hundreds of thousands of Armenians also died during or after deportation of hunger or disease. Others, however, were saved by Syria's governor, Cemal Pasha, who ensured that at least some deportees were provided with food. Contrary to Solarz'

understanding that the Armenian deportations/killings followed the killing of tens of thousands of Muslims by Armenians in the town of Van, the three scholars concurred that Talat's orders were issued several months prior to the Van massacre.

Why the Angst? The EU Does It...

16. (C) Solarz asked why the Turkish government objects so strongly to a U.S. Congressional resolution -- especially one that was non-binding -- when the EU Parliament recently passed one that was barely noticed in Turkey. Solarz emphasized that such a Congressional resolution would in no way reflect the views of the U.S. executive branch. According to Erdem, Europeans have been anti-Turkish/anti-Ottoman for centuries and the Turks have become inured to such an attitude. Americans, by contrast, are considered more impartial, thus a U.S. resolution would be harder to take; the average Turk would not make the distinction between "official USG" and "Congressional" views.

17. (C) Comment: The question of "intent" is key for many in determining whether "genocide" properly describes the tragic events of 1915-16. These Turkish (none of whom is an ethnic Armenian) scholars do allow for this intent, even as they acknowledge that it has not been documented. The "smoking gun," if such a thing ever existed in the Ottoman archives, either has been purged or is among the thousands of documents to which access has been restricted (ref C).
JONES